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Big River State Forest

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WHITE PINE

BIG RIVER STATE FOREST

Big River State Forest is six miles north of Oquawka on the Oquawka-Keithsburg black-top road in the northwest corner of Henderson County.

It is situated on the broad sandy intermediate terrace that exists between the Mississippi River floor plain, adjacent to the forest on the west, and the bluffs and upland agricultural land to the east.

The 2,671-acre forest was acquired by the state through five separate purchases, beginning in 1941 and 1942. Largest acquisition was in 1969. Additional land consists of 126 acres leased from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the 200-acre state-owned Oquawka Refuge, which is now managed as part of the Big River State Forest, for a total of 2,997 acres.

OQUAWKA REFUGE

The Oquawka Refuge was acquired in 1925. It contains the well-known Milroy plantation. This 17-acre planting of red, white and jack pine was established in 1928 and is the oldest pine plantation in the area. Trees are now 12-14 inches in diameter and 50 feet in height.

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Big River Forest soils are sandy and not well suited for agricultural purposes or even for the production of commercially desirable hardwood timber stands. Most of the area was in native scrub oak, consisting of black oak, blackjack oak and some hickory, approximately 140 acres had been cleared for unsuccessful farming operations.

These open fields had been abandoned prior to the time of acquisition and were in an idle unproductive state, with vegetation consisting of cactus, panic grass, ragweed and goldenrod, along with other broad-leaved weeds and a few patches of native prairie grasses. Some areas have since been planted to pine and are in various stages of development.

The existing hardwood forest land consists of low commercial value scrub timber that has been badly abused by high grading, grazing and fire; showing little promise for the future.

TIMBER STAND CONVERSION

Much of the forest is undergoing timber stand conversion to demonstrate the feasibility of growing profitable pine forests on this type of sand land. This consists of removing the scrub hardwood, salvaging the salable material for pulpwood, controlling hardwood re-

production and planting to white and red pine, which develops rapidly and shows excellent promise for the future. Through the years these practices have been emulated by other landowners, resulting in the establishment of hundreds of acres of successful pine plantations throughout the area.

FIRE DIMINISHING

Fires, which were fairly common in the past, now occur rarely since adjacent landowners are aware of the detrimental effects of fire to their own timberlands. A fire tower is located at the headquarters area, as well as ready fire-fighting crews and equipment to protect the forest during periods of threatened fire and damage.

Sixty miles of firebreaks interlace the forest, separating it into various compartments for management purposes as well as providing access and fire protection. Hiking and horseback riding are allowed on the firebreaks. Deep loose sand prohibits use of the firebreaks by vehicles other than four-wheel drive or tractors.

RECREATION POTENTIAL

There are only limited facilities for camping and picnicking. Several picnic areas have been established along Campbell Slough and Putney's Landing. A primitive camping facility is at Putney's Landing.

The Mississippi River, on the western boundary of the forest, provides boating and fishing enthusiasts with unlimited possibilities. Crappie, bass, carp, buffalo, channel cat, bluegill and bullhead are a few of the fish that inhabit these waters. Two boat launching ramps have been installed at Putney's Landing on Campbell Slough, to provide safe and easy access to the river and backwaters.

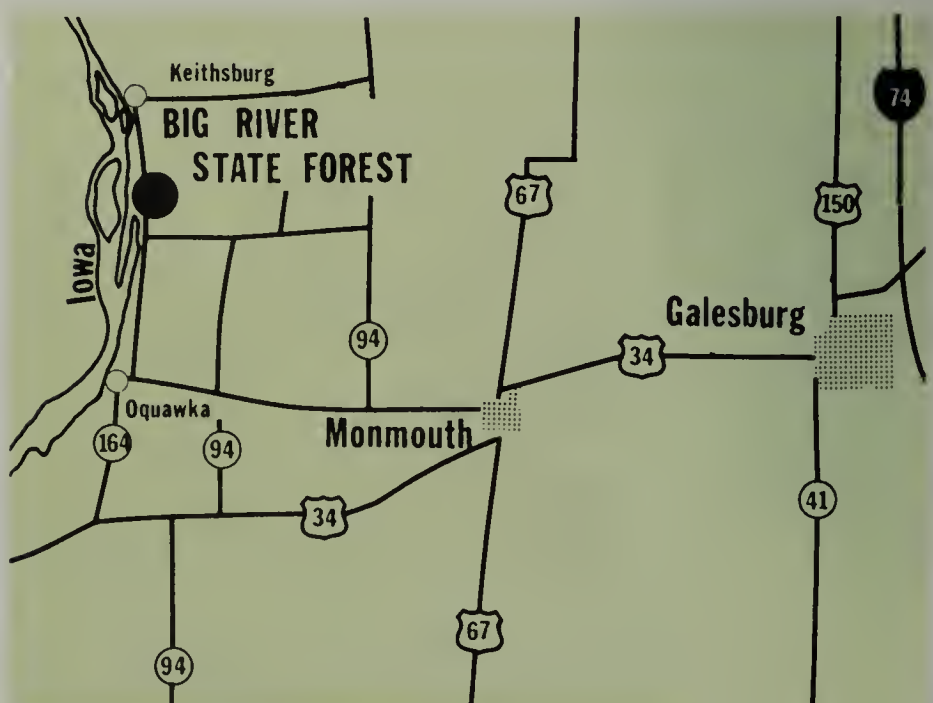
As part of the forest multiple-use program, hunting is permitted under Department Fish and Game laws as well as the federal Migratory Waterfowl regulations. The forest, with all types of existing cover, plenty of nearby water, protection from fire and sufficient game food, is ideal for all types of small game as well as deer, which have become numerous throughout the area. Quail, squirrel and rabbit are plentiful and are popular game animals along with deer. Food patches have been planted throughout the forest to supplement existing food and to improve habitat for upland game.

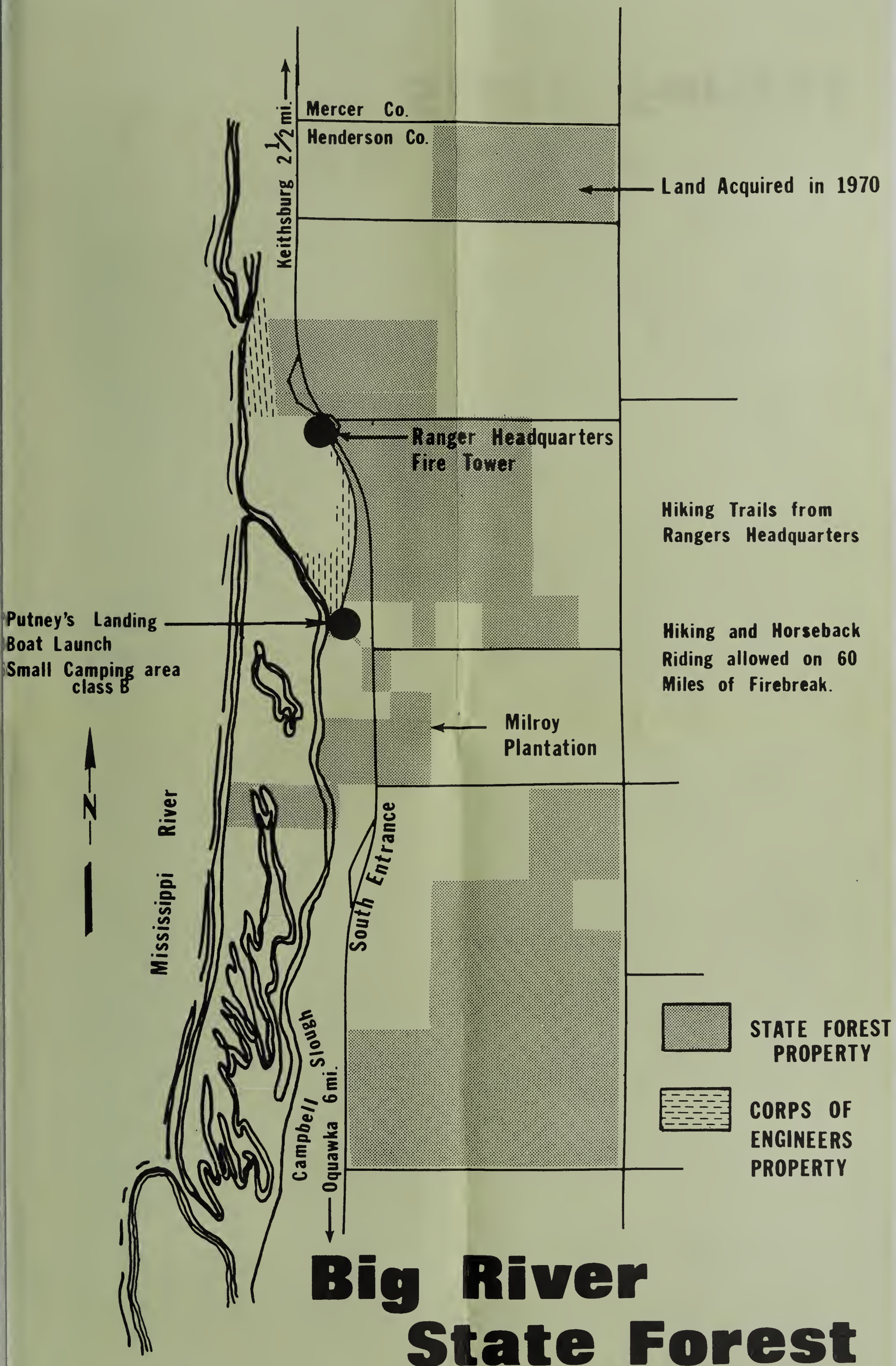
The hunting of waterfowl is popular. Wood duck, blue and green-winged teal, mallard, shoveller, as well as some Canadian geese, are familiar in the area.

FORESTRY DEMONSTRATION

The forest, open the year round, is primarily managed as an area for the demonstration of sound forestry practices on barren sand lands. Arrangements may be made by school groups for demonstrations and talks on forestry practices with the district forester or resident forest manager. The forest is also used for hiking, backpacking and primitive camping, as well as by nature study groups, horseback trail riders, bird watchers or Boy Scout troops.

You can assist greatly by being careful with fires and using the trash cans for litter.





ILLINOIS-CONSERVATION-FORESTRY



Richard B. Ogilvie, Governor

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